

**ROB STONE**  
**Back Around Him**  
EARWIG MUSIC

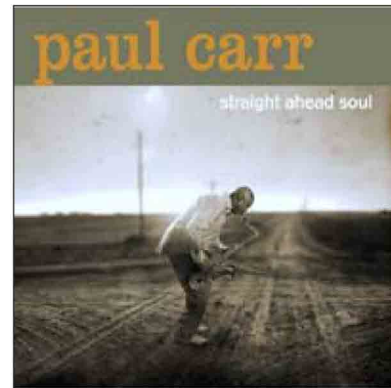
Chicago harmonica player Rob Stone was new to these ears until I heard him on several tracks on a new Earwig disc by Chris James and Patrick Rynn, "Gonna Boogie Anyway." Stone is a long-time associate of James and Rynn and they worked together as the C-Notes, which included touring with drummer Sam Lay. Stone had an album on Earwig 7 years ago, *Just My Luck*, and the label has just released his new album, "Back Around Him," which reunites Stone with the pair along with pianists David Maxwell and Aaron Moore, drummers Willie Hayes, Willie 'Big Eyes' Smith and Sam Lay, and a sax section led by Rodney Brown. The result is a set of classic Chicago blues that rocks and swings.

As a harmonica player, Stone has a fat tone that shows the influence of Little Walter, Big Walter, the two Sonny Boys and Junior Wells, while vocally his influences include Sam Cooke and Ray Charles as well as Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf. Eight of the twelve songs were co-penned by Stone, James and Rynn and are solid idiomatic tunes. As a vocalist, I like Stone's unforced, unaffected singing, which is mixed with some exceptional ensemble playing. The title track is a marvelous rocker with great piano from Maxwell and a cutting solo from James as the saxophones add an uptown flavor. Aaron Moore's piano is the anchor behind the slower tempo and Sonny Boy II styled harp on Sonny Boy I's "Love You For Myself," with Moore taking a terrific solo. Magic Sam's "Give Me Time" is in a more R&B tinged vein with James supplying guitar evoking the blues legend who left this world way too young 40 years ago. It's followed by a terrific shuffle about spending too much, "I Need to Plant a Money Tree," with some very effective Big Walter Horton inspired harp and Jeff Stone adding guitar to that of James to help sustain the driving groove.

"Chicago All Night" has a rumba groove with Maxwell setting the tone with his two-fisted playing as the saxes riff away. "Sloppy Drunk Blues" has been recorded numerous times, but Stone's interpretation goes back to the Leroy Carr rendition as James lays off here as Maxwell and Rynn provide support. "Can't Turn Back The Clock," is a rocking boogie with Maxwell, Rynn and

Sam Lay, with a terrific piano boogie-woogie solo from Maxwell. "It's Hard But It's Fair," is a bluesy reworking of The 5 Royales classic vocal group rocker. "Dragon Killers," is a hot instrumental that suggests Little Walter's "Roller Coaster." His playing on this shows plenty of drive as well as a clean, full-bodied tone.

Stone is a regular at the Chicago House of Blues' "Back Porch Stage," and given the powerful, Windy City sounding blues heard here, one can understand why. He plays strong blues that plays tribute to the music that is his inspiration, but as evidenced by the music on "Back Around Here," treats the idiom not as mere history, but as a living tradition to be celebrated. *Ron Weinstock*



**PAUL CARR**  
**Straight Ahead Soul**  
PAUL CARR JAZZ

Saxophonist Paul Carr has assembled a fine team for his fourth CD as leader. Returning from his 2008 release, *Musically Yours: Remembering Joe Henderson*, are bassist Michael Bowie and drummer Lewis Nash. Pianist Allyn Johnson and percussionist Sam "Seguito" Turner (both residents of Washington, DC with Carr) join this project and Chicago-based guitarist Bobby Broom rounds out the main crew. Carr's niece, Chelsey Green, plays viola on the closer, a solemn medley of church songs dedicated to Carr's late sister.

The nine-tune set consists of Carr originals and tunes by Johnson and Bowie as well as two of my favorite tracks: the Brazilian gem by Ivan Lins, "Love Wants to Dance," and the bluesy Eddie Lockjaw Davis tune "Light and Lovely."

Growing up in Houston, Texas, Carr (b. 1959) was influenced by recordings in his mother's large collection and began playing alto sax at age 11, switching to tenor as a high school senior. After three years at Texas Southern University, Carr moved to DC to attend Howard University from where he graduated with a Bachelor's degree in music performance. He's remained in the DC area since.

Alternating between tenor and soprano saxes, Carr's at his best when he's in his element: "...bathed in the blues and gospel, which is the soul of the South." When not waxing in a down-home mode, Carr's improvisations have a modern edge that pushes the envelope a bit and the best of those tunes nicely feature Broom.

*Nancy Ann Lee*